Immigrant Women
and a Framework for Immigration
to Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women

Gender/Immigrant Women Research Domain, Atlantic Metropolis Atlantique

Immigrant Women and a Framework for Immigration to Nova Scotia

A Brief prepared jointly by the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women and the Gender/Immigrant Women Research Domain, Atlantic Metropolis Atlantique in response to

A Framework for Immigration: A Discussion Paper, Province of Nova Scotia, 2004.

October 15, 2004

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...advancing equality, fairness and dignity for all women

The **Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women** was established by provincial statute in 1977. The Council's mandate under the *Advisory Council on the Status of Women Act* is to advise the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women and to bring forward the concerns of women in Nova Scotia.

The Council's work touches on all areas of women's lives, including:

- family life
- health
- economic security
- education
- legal rights
- paid and unpaid work
- sexuality
- violence

Council works toward the inclusion of women who face barriers to full equality because of race, age, language, class, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or various forms of family status.

We are committed to voicing women's concerns to government and the community through policy research, information services, and community outreach.

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The **Gender/Immigrant Women Research Domain of Atlantic Metropolis Atlantique** provides a unique entry point to identify issues of particular relevance to immigrant women that would otherwise be overlooked.

The objective is to provide a regional and national focus and a clearing-house for gender-based analysis of immigration and diversity. The domain engages in gender-based analysis of research questions emerging from the 12 federal priorities for policy-oriented research on immigration and integration and aims at ensuring that such questions take into account gender and immigrant women' s experiences.

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Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge the generous contribution made by the immigrant women who took time to share their experiences with us at the Round Table for Immigrant Women held at Saint Mary's University on October 5, 2004. Without their candid and forthright participation, it would not be possible to create a Nova Scotia Framework for Immigration that succeeds in its valuable intentions of increasing immigration and securing the participation of immigrants in all aspects of life in Nova Scotia, thus enriching the lives of everyone.

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Immigrant Women and a Framework for Immigration to Nova Scotia:

The Recommendations

The recommendations listed below arise from the brief following, and are listed in order of their appearance under each of the four proposed pillars of a Framework for Immigration.

Recommendations for a Welcoming Community

1. Educate children and adults to value different cultures.

2. Educate Nova Scotians that immigrants won't take away their jobs, but will create new opportunities for everyone.

3. Acknowledge the existing racism, take seriously and implement multi-cultural education, devise anti-racist strategies, promote employment equity.

4. Educate employers and the public that people with accents have a proven ability to learn another language.

5. Address the misinformation problem about Canadian labour market conditions, even for highly qualified immigrants, in sending countries. Too many immigrants are recruited with very high expectations of economic success and are rapidly disappointed. More realistic information is needed.

6. Canada Customs and Revenue Canada should also play their part in welcoming immigrants and avoid perceptions of racial profiling in their inspection and enforcement practices.

7. Lack of information to newcomers and especially women should be addressed and remedied. Places where such information can be provided are: airports, settlement organizations, immigrant groups or organizations, the YMCA Newcomers' Centre, the YWCA, women's centres outside of Halifax, and the Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

Recommendations for Attraction of Immigrant Women

8. There is a need to concentrate on the professions and trades, and to work with the regulatory bodies to help immigrant professionals integrate into the system. Accreditation issues go beyond medicine into other health care disciplines, engineering and engineering technology, other technology and trades occupations.

9. The Atlantic region should set up a foreign credential assessment service.

10. Public education of employers is needed about credential assessment agencies and degree equivalencies.

11. If foreign degrees or qualifications are not equivalent, then pathways should be set up to assist immigrants to get recognition of prior learning as well as any needed upgrading. These pathways should be clearly communicated.

12. Gender based analysis is needed to identify specific gender needs and gender implications of proposed policies, to come up with equitable solutions.

13. Anti-racism education is needed of professional associations, trades associations, organized labour and employers as there is a perception of systematic discrimination in the treatment of foreign graduates and tradespersons.

Recommendations for Integration of Immigrant Women

14. Expand ESL to include English for the professions, for the trades and for entrepreneurship and business.

15. Fund ESL training after one becomes a citizen. This measure is particularly important to women.

16. Availability of Early Learning and Child Care is not simply a gender-sensitive policy but a *gender-sensitive immigration policy*, vital to allowing immigrant women (who do not have access to extended families) to become successfully financially integrated in Nova Scotia communities and for their children to get the best start in life.

17. Ideally, there should be a stand-alone agency on immigration and settlement within the Province. If immigration is placed within any existing government department, it runs the risk of being marginalized within the dominant concerns and core businesses of the department. Furthermore, the horizontal planning needed to create a successful immigration strategy would be more difficult to carry out successfully.

18. Devise a process of input into any immigration strategy or policy from the most invisible and the most vulnerable categories of immigrant women, such as live-in care givers and refugees. Round tables or confidential meetings at different time slots during the day and the evening that would be accessible to different groups of women are needed, with special efforts and supports to allow the least privileged to participate.

Recommendations for Retention of Immmigrant Women

19. Diversity will enhance the quality of life in our province. We need immigrants and

cannot afford to leave women out of our strategies and policies. This lesson should be driven home by public education and the development of an immigrant-positive policy discourse that values the principles of cultural diversity, gender equity and social inclusion.

20. The province needs to take action on immigration **now**.

21. The province needs a holistic approach to immigration that will be taking into account diverse groups and gender issues. There has to be good coordination of government efforts on various levels. A person in each government department should be designated to play this liaison role, and more joint federal-provincial action and service integration is needed to optimize services to immigrants, both women and men.

22. We should be making better use of the media in a public education campaign around immigration, the contributions of immigrants to our society, the importance of diversity in a "global village".

23. All the recommendations pertaining to "attraction" (above) pertain to retention as well.

Conclusion

24. The Province of Nova Scotia commit itself to incorporating Gender Based Analysis in its immigration strategy. Immigrant women should be asked to participate in the formulation of the strategy, so that their concerns can be addressed accurately and comprehensively.

Immigrant Women and a Framework for Immigration to Nova Scotia

This brief is a collaboration between the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women and the Gender/Immigrant Women Domain of Atlantic Metropolis Atlantique, with the purpose of reviewing the Province of Nova Scotia discussion paper, ***A Framework for Immigration***.

The discussion paper provides many valuable ideas and insights. However, nowhere is there any recognition that a successful immigration strategy, not to mention a larger population strategy, must take the differential impact of legislation, policies and programs on women and men into account. The proponents of the recommendations made in this brief hold that an adequate analysis of the impact of gender, a recognition of the different life situations and experiences of immigrant women and men is essential in formulating a successful immigration strategy for this province.

Gender and Women: Why they matter in immigration policy

Women and gender are not identical, as they are often perceived. Gender is a concept that refers to both men and women. A gender-based perspective or analysis refers to an awareness of the social significance of differences between women and men and an awareness of the implications of how such differences are perceived for policy-making. This social significance of difference is manifested in the making of institutions, policies and identities on the basis of assumptions about the socially acceptable roles of men and women. As a result, gender assumptions underlie every major social institution and policy, but are often not recognized as such and institutions and policies are seen as "neutral."

Women matter in immigration policy from an economic and social standpoint because:

- They represent important human resources as professionals, entrepreneurs, skilled workers, and trainees who will fill important labour shortages and create new business and employment opportunties. Because of their gender roles in caring for families, young and old, policies responsive to the roles of women in different cultural contexts need to be set in place for their labour market potential to unfold.

- As the primary caregivers in families, women's unpaid "labour of love" has enabled men to devote relatively undivided attention to their employment. This "breadwinner" model of the family has steadily eroded in the last half of the 20th century, when women both here in Nova Scotia, in Canada and in other parts of the world entered the paid workforce in unprecedented numbers. However, women in the paid labour force remain society's primary care-givers, nurturing and socializing future generations and caring for relatives with disabilities and elderly parents. In their caring roles women's contributions to the economy are unaccounted for but are often estimated in billions of dollars. An investment in attracting and successfully integrating female immigrants and families is an

investment in Nova Scotia's future.

- Women's volunteer labour in communities (ethnic organizations, multicultural organizations, PTA committees, neighbourhood committees, churches, immigrant networks and organizations, sanctuary movements and so forth) saves the economy countless dollars for services to newcomers, families, children in poverty, etc. Research has shown that immigrant women are often the pillars of migrant and ethnic communities, offering immigration tools and networks, and welcoming and support services to newcomers and the poor. In addition, such services, organizations and movements enrich and enhance Canada's multicultural society and make Canadian citizenship more inclusive for the benefit of all Canadians.

- From a purely economic standpoint, women are the primary consumers of many commodities (e.g. such as those that have to do with their roles as care-givers, partners, mothers and so forth). Furthermore, as tax payers, they contribute to the revenues of governments.

Gender matters in immigration policy from an economic and social standpoint because:

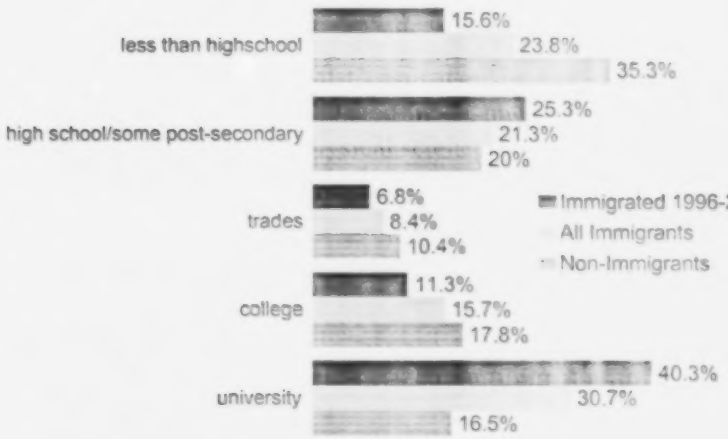
- Gender-based social expectations and gender identities lead women and men to perform different roles in the migration process, in terms of who makes the decision to leave, who leaves first, who prepares for the move in which ways, who is expected to find employment first, who is taking care of the family in the meantime, who gets accredited first, who learns a new language first, who takes time off work in order to care for sick children, who makes the social contacts, who keeps the family contacts and so forth. Gender-based social institutions are shaped in order to respond to these social expectations of socially appropriate roles. In the process of doing so, institutions (i) often marginalize and neglect the human capital potential of the many immigrant men and women who do not conform to gender-based social expectations; and (ii) take for granted and socially discount women's unpaid "labour of love" as they consider it part of women's "human nature."

- Policies are often designed without a clear picture of their gender implications (without a gender-based analysis). This results in unintended demographic, social and economic consequences. For example, employment policies that do not provide for adequately-paid maternity leaves or day care result in limiting the size of families, children left behind in countries of origin for care, and women withdrawing from the paid labour force. Professional accreditation policies that do not take into account women's care-giving responsibilities may result in professional women's not being able to practise in Canadian communities where their skills and experiences are much needed or having to repeat their entire training. It is vital that gender-based analysis be carried out before any new law or policy is implemented.

The Statistical Evidence: Immigrant Women's Education, Labour Market Participation and Income

There are substantial differences in the educational and economic situations of immigrant and non-immigrant women in Nova Scotia and those differences are more pronounced for recently immigrated women. Overall, immigrant women have higher levels of educational attainment than non-immigrant women, they have slightly lower labour force participation rates, and though the unemployment rates of **all** immigrant women are slightly lower than those of non-immigrant women, **recently** immigrated women are much more likely to be unemployed. Once employed full-time, immigrant women, even those recently immigrated, have employment income levels that are comparable if not somewhat higher than those of non-immigrant women. But differences in rates of employment mean that the overall income levels of recently immigrated women are substantially lower than those of other women. Consequently, the incidence of low income among recently immigrated women is three times higher than it is for non-immigrant women.

Educational Attainment and Immigrant Status
Women in Nova Scotia, 2001



Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census, table # [illegible]

Immigrant women are considerably less likely than non-immigrant women to have low levels of education. 24% of immigrant women and just under 16% of recently immigrated women have less than a high school education, compared to 35% of non-immigrant women in the province.

Immigrant women, especially those who have immigrated recently (ie., 1996-2001), on the other hand, are considerably more likely to have a university education than non-immigrant women in Nova Scotia. Over 40% of recently immigrated women have university levels of education (certificates, diplomas, or degrees) compared to 16.5% of non-immigrant women in the province.

In terms of fields of educational specialization, women who immigrated to Nova Scotia within the 10 years preceding the 2001 Census were twice as likely as non-immigrant women to have specialized in humanities and related fields, about 3½ times more likely to have specialized in mathematics, computers, or physical sciences, and about ten times more likely to have

specialized in engineering and applied sciences. Immigrant women are less likely than non-immigrant women to have specialized in commerce, management, and business administration.

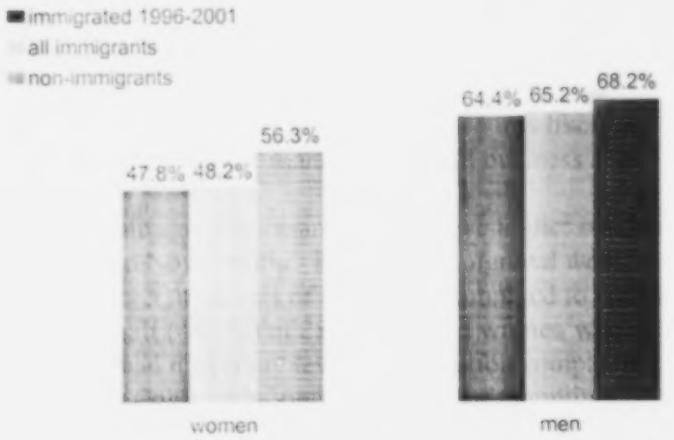
Even when comparing women of the same age, immigrant women have higher educational attainment than non-immigrant women in Nova Scotia. Recently immigrated women aged 25-44 are more than twice as likely to have university levels of education compared to non-immigrant women of the same age. Very close to half (48.9%) of 25-44 year-old women who immigrated to Nova Scotia between 1996 and 2001 had university levels of education compared to 23.5% of non-immigrant women of the same age. Conversely, only 9% of recently immigrated women aged 25-44 had less than high school compared to 18.4% of non-immigrant women of the same age.

Immigrant men and non-immigrant men have relatively comparable labour force participation rates.

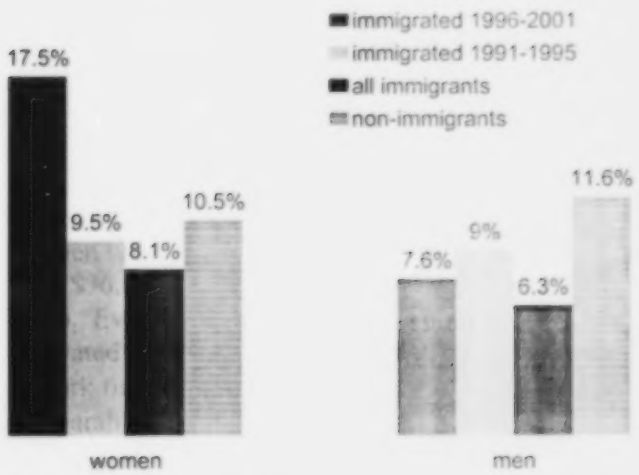
Immigrant women's labour force participation rates are somewhat lower than non-immigrant women's.

Immigrant women, overall, are about 2½ times more likely than non-immigrant women to be self-employed (immigrant men are twice as likely as non-immigrant men to be self-employed). However, recently immigrated women and men are not as likely as they were in the past to be self-employed.

Labour Force Participation Rates, Immigrant Status and Gender
Nova Scotia, 2001



Unemployment Rates, Immigrant Status and Gender
Nova Scotia, 2001



Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census, table # 97F0009XCB01043

Unemployment rates of immigrant men, even those recently immigrated, are somewhat lower than those of non-immigrant men.

Women who are recent immigrants (first five years) to Nova Scotia, on the other hand, have much higher unemployment rates than either non-immigrant women or all immigrant women. Immigrant women who have been in Nova Scotia for more than five years, have comparable, if not slightly lower rates of unemployment than non-immigrant women.

Immigrant women who work full-time earn somewhat more, on average, than non-immigrant women who work full-time ($36,086 versus $30,348). Even recently immigrated women who work full-time have comparable or slightly higher levels of **employment income** than non-immigrant women in Nova Scotia. The same pattern is evident for men.

Average Employment Income by Immigrant Status and Sex
Nova Scotia, 2001
(full-time workers)

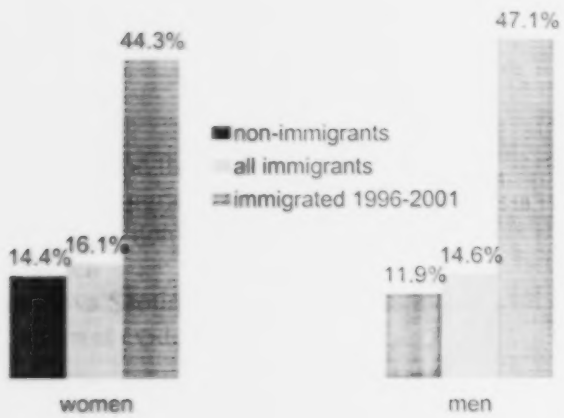
Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census, Table # 97F0009XCB01043

Because of differences in rates of employment, however, especially among recently immigrated women, average **total income** levels are considerably lower for recently immigrated women ($14,929) than they are for either all immigrant women ($22,144) or non-immigrant women ($19,173) in Nova Scotia. The same pattern is evident for men.

Average Income by Immigrant Status and Sex
Nova Scotia, 2001

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census, Table # 97F0009XCB01043

Incidence of Low Income by Immigrant Status and Sex
Nova Scotia, 2001 (economic family persons)



Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census, Table # 97F0009XCB01043

Due, in part, to factors such as differences in overall income (see above), the incidence of low income among recently immigrated women and men is significantly higher than it is for either all immigrant women and men or non-immigrants. 44.3% of recently immigrated women and 47.1% of recently immigrated men are living below the low-income cut-offs compared to 14.4% of non-immigrant women and 11.9% of non-immigrant men.

Despite their higher educational attainment, the labour force and economic situation of recently immigrated women is precarious in comparison to non-immigrant women and to immigrant women who have resided in Nova Scotia for longer periods of time.

The Round Table for Immigrant Women: Taking Women and Gender Seriously

In order to hear the response from immigrant women themselves to the Framework for Immigration Discussion Paper, and what issues they felt were important to consider in a future immigration strategy, a Round Table for Immigrant Women was convened at Saint Mary's University on October 5, 2004. The voices of participants lend substance to the considerations outlined above, and will be an essential component of an eventual immigration strategy for the province.

Our round table participants brought up many important issuess through their stories and experiences of immigration. Our participants were immigrant women from various walks of life. The stories they told and the issues they raised pertained not only to themselves as individual women, but to their entire families, to their husbands, parents and children. The women witnessed, participated and lived through these experiences themselves as care-givers, spouses, mothers, sisters, partners, professionals and working women, as ethnic and immigrant community members. Their stories are set in the context of their relationships–and sometimes the absence of relationships. The stories are immigrant family stories seen through the eyes of their female members. As such, they merit special attention in Nova Scotia's immigration strategy, because this strategy, being at the same time a population strategy, aims primarily at attracting families to Nova Scotia. A decision to come, stay or leave is often premised upon the successful settlement and integration of entire families, not only husbands or single men.

Noting that there is often an overlap and a crossover between the various categories, for example, reasons why people are attracted and why they choose to stay, or between a "welcoming community" and how immigrants integrate, we have grouped their comments under the four pillars of the immigration strategy as identified in the Discussion Paper.

On "Welcoming Community"

- The lengthy and difficult process immigrants, especially professionals in highly regulated fields, have to go through in order to obtain employment in Nova Scotia renders this province unattractive from the point of view of of settlement.

- Access to government services is made increasingly difficult by modern technology. "Welcoming communities" involve people not call centres, web sites and brochures alone. This point is relevant to every order of government.
- International students are assessed in visa offices abroad in a 5 minute interview about whether they should be granted visas to study in Canada and they are turned down if a decision is made that they are not sufficiently committed to their country of origin.

- Husbands often leave Canada for lack of work and go back to work in the country of origin, leaving wives and children behind in Canada. It is not a welcoming community which forces families to separate.

- Racism is alive and well in Nova Scotia, especially experienced by highly qualified immigrant professional women and families, affecting job prospects, ability to practice in their professions, their professional identities and the well-being of immigrant families.

- N.S. Health cards are no longer valid when immigrants go abroad to work even if they leave their property and operate businesses in Canada as well as pay their taxes. Upon re-applying when one returns to Canada, re-issue of the Health card is not guaranteed.

Recommendations for a Welcoming Community

1. Educate children and adults to value different cultures.

2. Educate Nova Scotians that immigrants won't take away their jobs, but will create new opportunities for everyone.

3. Acknowledge the existing racism, take seriously and implement multi-cultural education, devise anti-racist strategies, promote employment equity.

4. Educate employers and the public that people with accents have a proven ability to learn another language.

5. Address the misinformation problem about Canadian labour market conditions, even for highly qualified immigrants, in sending countries. Too many immigrants are recruited with very high expectations of economic success and are rapidly disappointed. More realistic information is needed.

6. Canada Customs and Revenue Canada should also play their part in welcoming immigrants and avoid perceptions of racial profiling in their inspection and enforcement practices.

7. Lack of information to newcomers and especially women should be addressed and remedied. Places where such information can be provided are: airports, settlement organizations, immigrant groups or organizations, the YMCA Newcomers' Centre, the YWCA, women's centres outside of Halifax, and the Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

On Attraction

Attraction of highly qualified immigrants, especially immigrant physicians, is highly problematic because

- there is no systematic way of getting information about what they need to do in order to specialize and practice in Nova Scotia;
- there are racist attitudes about foreign-trained physicians whereby the latter are asked to "prove" that they are better than the Canadian-trained;
- there is a very limited number of residencies (if they pass the medical exams);
- these residencies are only in family medicine where Canadian-trained doctors do not particularly want to enter;
- the waiting period for a specialty is between 5-10 years, even in areas such as child psychiatry where there is a tremendous shortage of qualified practitioners;
- foreign-trained women physicians are especially disadvantaged because they often cannot write the Canadian exams within a reasonable time frame due to family responsibilities and caregiving. These professionals are in a double bind because they are called to "choose" between staying with their families in Nova Scotia or going back to the countries where they were trained to be able to practice and maintain their professional credentials and identities.
- Foreign medical graduates in dentistry have to pay $ 80,000 to repeat two years of dental school, if they can even get in.
- Physician couples and other professional families are forced to separate and go to different provinces or regions, so that both spouses can practice their profession. If one is made to sacrifice, it is usually the female immigrant physician.
- Nutritionists and nurses have been faced with similar problems. They can teach in universities due to their high qualifications, but they have faced enormous difficulties in order to be able to also practice in their professions.
- Women with trades training and credentials, even in traditional fields such as hairdressing, find they cannot get a license to practice their trade without extensive repetition of training, or acceptance of positions at considerably less pay than they are qualified for.

Recommendations for Attraction of Immigrant Women

8. There is a need to concentrate on the professions and trades, and to work with the regulatory bodies to help immigrant professionals integrate into the system. Accreditation issues go beyond medicine into other health care disciplines, engineering and engineering technology, other technology and trades occupations.

9. The Atlantic region should set up a foreign credential assessment service.

10. Public education of employers is needed about credential assessment agencies and degree equivalencies.

11. If foreign degrees or qualifications are not equivalent, then pathways should be set up to assist immigrants to get recognition of prior learning as well as any needed upgrading. These pathways should be clearly communicated.

12. Gender based analysis is needed to identify specific gender needs and gender implications of proposed policies, to come up with equitable solutions.

13. Anti-racism education is needed of professional associations, trades associations, organized labour and employers as there is a perception of systematic discrimination in the treatment of foreign graduates and tradespersons.

On Integration

- After becoming a citizen one cannot get English as a Second Language (ESL) training, on the assumption that a command of English is a prerequisite to citizenship.

- The timing has specific gender implications. Women stay at home caring for young families for longer periods of time. By the time they obtain citizenship they may have lost the opportunity to learn English to the high-functioning level required for employment in their fields.

- Childcare during ESL is also an issue for many immigrant women.
- Currently there are only very few employees in the N.S. government focusing on immigration. Few resources are placed in the area of immigration and settlement. There is a lack of coordination with other orders of government and huge gaps in services.

- Live-in caregivers' experiences are totally missing from this discussion paper. These are the immigrant women who are working in the most exploitative conditions. These are the most vulnerable immigrant women who have been unable in the day time to attend forums like the round table on which these recommendations are based.

- All the obstacles identified in "attraction" pertain to integration as well.

- Racism affects hiring prospects of immigrants and should be addressed. Immigrant women and families pushed outside of the labour market or forced into work at a much lower level than they had in their country of origin are not likely to stay.

Recommendations for Integration of Immigrant Women

14. Expand ESL to include English for the professions, for the trades and for entrepreneurship and business.

15. Fund ESL training after one becomes a citizen. This measure is particularly important to women.

16. Availability of Early Learning and Child Care is not simply a gender-sensitive policy but a *gender-sensitive immigration policy*, vital to allowing immigrant women (who do not have access to extended families) to become successfully financially integrated in Nova Scotia communities and for their children to get the best start in life.

17. Ideally, there should be a stand-alone agency on immigration and settlement within the Province. If immigration is placed within any existing government department, it runs the risk of being marginalized within the dominant concerns and core businesses of the department. Furthermore, the horizontal planning needed to create a successful immigration strategy would be more difficult to carry out successfully.

18. Devise a process of input into any immigration strategy or policy from the most invisible and the most vulnerable categories of immigrant women, such as live-in care givers and refugees. Round tables or confidential meetings at different time slots during the day and the evening that would be accessible to different groups of women are needed, with special efforts and supports to allow the least privileged to participate.

On Retention

- The lengthy and difficult process immigrants have to go through in order to obtain employment in Nova Scotia leads many of them to simply give up and leave, either for other jurisdictions in Canada or to return to their countries of origin.

- All the obstacles identified in "attraction" (above) pertain to retention as well.

- Racism is experienced on various levels and dimensions of social life but especially in hiring and in employment.

Recommendations for Retention of Immmigrant Women

19. Diversity will enhance the quality of life in our province. We need immigrants and cannot afford to leave women out of our strategies and policies. This lesson should be driven home by public education and the development of an immigrant-positive policy discourse that values the principles of cultural diversity, gender equity and social inclusion.

20. The province needs to take action on immigration **now**.

21. The province needs a holistic approach to immigration that will be taking into account diverse groups and gender issues. There has to be good coordination of government efforts on various levels. A person in each government department should be designated to play this liaison role, and more joint federal-provincial action and service integration is needed to optimize services to immigrants, both women and men.

22. We should be making better use of the media in a public education campaign around immigration, the contributions of immigrants to our society, the importance of diversity in a "global village".

23. All the recommendations pertaining to "attraction" (above) pertain to retention as well.

Conclusions

It is the intention of this brief to demonstrate the importance and utility of taking the situation of immigrant women into account in developing a successful immigration strategy for the Province of Nova Scotia, a province that has become a new and beloved home to so many of us. The women who spoke to government officials at the Round Table for Immigrant Women bring their experiences forward in a positive and constructive manner, to provide for a better Nova Scotia not only for themselves, but for all of us.

The Advisory Council on the Status of Women has made previous recommendations pertinent to the issues addressed in the Framework for Immigration, specifically in a presentation to the Parliamentary Committee on Immigration in February, 2003. For the record, this presentation is attached as Appendix A to this brief.

The Round Table for Immigrant Women was a first step in the right direction. If gender-based analysis is to play a significant role in shaping Nova Scotia's immigration strategy, ongoing and broader involvement of immigrant women is essential.

It is recommended, therefore, that:

24. The Province of Nova Scotia commit itself to incorporating Gender Based Analysis in its immigration strategy. Immigrant women should be asked to participate in the formulation of the strategy, so that their concerns are addressed accurately and comprehensively.

Insofar as the immigration strategy forms part of a larger population strategy for Nova Scotia, and an element of a broader social policy framework, it is essential that the concerns of women be explicitly addressed in each of these areas. Family policy, community development policy, health policy, economic development policy: none of these will be as effective as possible if they leave issues of women and gender out of account. And women are more than ready to participate and to make their concerns and solutions known.

Appendix A:

Presentation to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women
February, 2003

IMMIGRATION SETTLEMENT PROGRAMS: ISSUES FACING WOMEN IN NOVA SCOTIA

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon. On behalf of the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, I am pleased to present these remarks about Immigrant Settlement Programs in Nova Scotia in relation to the issues facing immigrant women.

The mandate of the Council is to bring forward to government issues of interest and concern to women and to advise government on matters related to the status of women. Since it was formed in 1977, the Council has worked with all levels of government, women's groups, and other organizations on a wide range of issues affecting women relating to family law, economic security, sexuality, health, education, paid and unpaid work and family violence.

The nature of immigration has changed dramatically in the last 25 years. More immigrants face greater challenges in terms of employment, 2nd language acquisition, integration and cultural adjustment. Nova Scotia has lower levels of immigration than many of the other provinces in central and western Canada, but as in other provinces, there has been a shift in immigration patterns over the years. Most immigrants to Nova Scotia now come from Asia, and mostly from west central Asia and the middle east. As Martin Papillon noted in a paper for the Canadian Policy Research Network (CPRN), immigration is important for the future of Canada and is one of our greatest assets in terms of both human resources and what he calls "cultural capital"–the cultural mix which is a source of creativity and innovation. But at the same time the increasing diversity of the immigrant population presents new challenges for us as a nation and for immigrants themselves. This is especially true in relation to the provision of immigrant settlement services in general, but in particular in relation to serving the needs of women.

♀ **Expectations and the use of Immigration Consultants:** Increased challenges related to settlement by new immigrants may also be linked to an increased reliance on immigrant

consultants in some countries of emigration where communities largely rely on private consultants in the country of origin to facilitate the immigration process. We are informed that these consultants do not always provide realistic advice to prospective immigrants about their prospects, the resources they need, or what they might expect when they arrive in Canada.

We recommend that there be a certification process and more monitoring of private immigration consultants abroad to ensure that they are providing accurate information and advice.

♀ **Nova Scotia and Immigrant Settlement Services:** Nova Scotia wants to attract and retain more immigrants but there are difficulties in doing so, in part because of the low level of settlement services. New arrivals often face more challenges than in the past, yet there is less money for settlement support in Nova Scotia. This is because there are problems with the overall scope of settlement services and the amount of money provided by the federal government for settlement and with the current funding formula which we believe is flawed. The allocation for settlement services is based on previous immigration levels using a three year rolling average formula. Since Nova Scotia's immigration levels have declined in recent year, the funding to N.S. agencies has declined by 10% each year for the last few years. But this ends up being a 'chicken and egg' situation. If you cannot offer the services, immigrants are reluctant to come or are unable to settle. In these circumstances, the word gets back to the countries of emigration and others interested in immigration are likely to look for other locations. Under the current formula the only way resources could increase would be through higher immigrant intake, but without more settlement resources, there would be increasing difficulties for settlement agencies. This would be a disservice to immigrants.

We recommend an immediate freeze on any further reductions to settlement funding and consultations with the province and the settlement agencies to develop a more equitable formula for provinces with lower than average immigration.

♀ **Particular Issues of Concern for Immigrant Women:** Immigrant women face many common challenges when they arrive in Canada such as the effects of racism, language acquisition, and recognition of foreign credentials. The issue of the provision of settlement services is of concern in relation to these issues, but it is also of concern in relation to the particular concerns of women. Immigrant women, however, are not an homogeneous group and conditions and adjustment challenges vary depending on the circumstances of the immigrant herself, her family and cultural background, and her education and skills. Women who immigrate as individuals or as dependent family members often face particular difficulties and challenges in terms of employment or language acquisition. The provision of services often do not take into account the difficulties of meeting language learning time-lines created by women's care-giving responsibilities. Those who arrive as sponsored "family class" immigrants or as sponsored refugees can be in a particularly vulnerable position because of their financial dependency on others. Despite these differences in conditions and circumstances of immigration, however, there is often not enough support for female immigrants and their families. Cultural adjustment, language training, employment services are important, if currently inadequate, components of settlement services, but more needs to be done in the areas of access to affordable housing, and support for women with children.

Financial dependency: Women who come as dependents of "independent" class immigrants or as sponsored "family class" immigrants often find they are more financially dependent on their spouse after they immigrate because they have come to Canada in the context of decisions based on improving the economic viability of the family or of opportunities for their husbands rather than for themselves. Women with children who were financially dependent on their husband before arrival may find that the financial situation of the family has changed for the worse, rather than for the better

after coming to Canada because her spouse faces unforeseen problems finding employment or establishing a business. In some cases, when the money runs out, the husband must return to the country of origin to earn money, leaving his wife and children to cope as best they can here. We understand that in some cultures, if there is an older male child present, he will be made responsible for family decisions, including finances. This makes issues related to financial dependency all the more problematic. For all of these reasons women coming as dependents may face more settlement challenges than their spouses in terms of finding viable employment, cultural adjustment and language acquisition. This situation can be made worse if the financial situation of the family is strained. Recent research conducted by MISA, for example, demonstrated that these women in particular may be especially vulnerable to social isolation and various forms of abuse, yet there are no special services for them. This is only one of many other specific challenges women face related to settlement and cultural adjustment.

There must be adequate support and counseling services which go beyond language acquisition, which are both culturally and gender sensitive to help women to cope in these situations.

Employment: Whether women come as independent immigrants as dependent family members or as sponsored immigrants they and their families face challenges related to employment and income. In some cases the economic circumstances of immigrants can be fragile and they may move back to the country of origin to earn money temporarily, move back permanently, or move on to other locations in Canada in the hope that things might be better there. For those immigrants who enter under the business class and intending to establish businesses here, there are difficulties in doing so in part because of bureaucratic and cultural challenges here but also because the quality of advice many immigrants receive in the country of origin and once they arrive may be questionable. The recognition of foreign credentials has been flagged as an important issue which needs to be addressed if immigrants are to create a decent life in Canada. New immigrants also need more opportunities to develop and translate their skills in the

context of the Canadian labour market. We understand, however that very little beyond employment counseling and job search skills is provided to help immigrants find employment under the settlement program and that HRDC has not been forthcoming with other kinds of employment development services immigrants need.

We recommend that the federal and provincial governments take immediate action on the issue of recognizing foreign credentials; that business class immigrants be provided with realistic and accurate advice about establishing business in Canada; and that the Canadian government through HRDC take more responsibility for helping immigrants to translate and develop their skills into the Canadian labour market context as well as to gain on the job experience in Canada.

Language acquisition and cultural adjustment: Women are now eligible for second language learning, whether they come as independent immigrants, as family members, or as sponsored family class immigrants. However the time lines for the provision of language training do not take into account women's care-giving responsibilities. While second language acquisition is an important part of cultural adjustment, cultural adjustment must be seen as broader than second language acquisition. Many language schools try to address the specific cultural and gender issues faced by women, but they often meet bureaucratic and funding barriers. We recently heard, for example, of a language school in Bedford which was forced to close because of funding difficulties. This language school brought together immigrant women with pre-school children–mostly from middle eastern countries–into a safe environment of mutual support and learning. Without this support service, many of these women now face social isolation and issues related to cultural integration. As mothers, for example, they often find it difficult to communicate with the schools attended by their children. In some instances have become vulnerable to financial, psychological or even physical abuse which they are reluctant, for cultural and other reasons, to bring to the attention of the authorities.

We recommend that cultural and gender specific issues faced by immigrant women be taken into account in the funding and delivery of settlement services in Canada.

♀ **Women Newcomers Who Are Outside the Immigration System:** Finally, we wish to bring to your attention the issues and concerns of those who fall outside the official immigration process–non-sponsored refugees and wives of students coming to Canada to study. These women face similar situations as those discussed above, but because they are not officially "immigrants", there are limited or no support services available. Nevertheless, non-sponsored immigrants and students who come on work on student visas often stay in Canada for long periods or, in the case of students they often want to return as immigrants later. If Canada is in the business of attracting immigrants and really wants to foster integration and cultural adjustment, it makes sense to include this population inside a net of services for newcomers, whatever their "official" status.

We recommend that consideration be given to broadening the scope of immigrant settlement services to include provision of services for all newcomers, including refugees and students.